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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 SINGAPORE 000343

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SUBJECT: MUSLIM MPS IN SINGAPORE: PART 2 OF 2

REF: SINGAPORE 312

Classified By: Amb. Franklin L. Lavin, Reasons 1.4 (b)(d)

1. (U) This cable completes the biographic reporting on Singapore's 12 Muslim MPs. Reftel covered five of them and reviewed the role they play in Singapore and how they are perceived by the Muslim community. The biographies are designed to be stand-alone documents, so acronyms and organizations are described in each biography.

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MP Biographies  
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Halimah Binte Yacob

2. (U) Halimah Binte Yacob has been a member of parliament since 2001. She was one of 25 new candidates fielded by the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) that year and was the first female Muslim MP to be elected since 1959. She reportedly declined several invitations from the PAP to enter politics while her children were younger, but finally joined after a personal invitation from then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong. In December 2004, she was named to the PAP's Central Executive Committee, making her one of its two Muslim representatives.

3. (U) In parliament, Halimah has championed the interests of workers and women. In particular, she is concerned about older and less skilled workers, many of whom are Malays, who have been hurt by Singapore's economic restructuring and shift away from traditional manufacturing. Halimah also fought successfully for equal medical benefits for women civil servants. She has criticized academic streaming or tracking, which she considers elitist and detrimental to racial and cultural integration among Singaporean children.

4. (C) Halimah does not appear to have a prominent position in the Muslim community. She occasionally appears on the Malay-language television news, but seldom is quoted in Berita Harian, Singapore's Malay-language newspaper, and rarely attends large Malay/Muslim events attended by embassies. The leadership of Jamiyah (the Muslim Missionary Society) was unenthusiastic about her in a recent meeting with embassies. Halimah has a much stronger background in the trade union movement. She first joined the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) in 1978. She has served several stints in the Ministry of Manpower and, in 1999, was recruited by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions to represent Singapore at the International Labour Organization (ILO). Within Singapore's Muslim community, she has taken the lead in co-ordinating job-training programs run by the various Muslim self-help groups.

5. (U) In 2003, Halimah participated in an International Visitor Program on Organized Labor in the United States and was impressed by U.S. laws ensuring equal employment opportunity. It was her first trip to the U.S., but she has traveled extensively in Southeast Asia and Western Europe.

6. (U) Born in Singapore on August 23, 1954, Halimah comes from a humble background. Her ethnic Indian father died when she was eight years old, leaving the family impoverished. She helped her ethnic Malay mother to sell food to support the family. Due to this experience, she believes that people can overcome difficult circumstances through hard work, but the government should lend a helping hand. With a scholarship from the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS), she was able to attend the University of Singapore law school. In 1978 she earned her Bachelor of Law degree and later a Masters in 2002 from the National University of Singapore. Her husband is a businessman and they have five children in their late teens and early twenties. She speaks excellent Malay and wears traditional Malay/Muslim clothing.

Mohamad Maidin Bin Packer Mohd

7. (U) Mohamad Maidin Bin Packer Mohd first entered parliament in 1991. He has held a number of sub-cabinet positions at the Ministries of Education, Environment, and Information and the Arts. Since 2001, he has been Senior

Parliamentary Secretary at the Ministry of Home Affairs. As the highest ranking Muslim in the Ministry which administers the Internal Security Act, under which Jemaah Islamiyah suspects have been detained without trial, Mohamad Maidin has the sensitive task of assuring Singapore's Muslim minority that the process is fair.

18. (U) Maidin has deep ties with the Muslim community. He was a founding member of MENDAKI (the leading Malay/Muslim education self-help group linked to the government) and has been involved with other groups, such as the Islamic Welfare Association and the Malay Language Council. He was a journalist and assistant to the editor for more than ten years at Berita Harian, Singapore's Malay language newspaper. Then Deputy Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong recruited him to join the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) in 1988 to focus on Malay issues and improve communication with the Malay/Muslim community. At that time, his supervisor at the paper, Zainul Abidin Rasheed (now an MP and Minister of State at MFA), said that Malays who joined the PAP were seen as selling out.

19. (U) He has strongly condemned terrorism and extremism, but is frustrated with western media depictions of Islam. After the 9/11 attacks, he said "the only way to live as a Muslim is to live as a moderate." He has called on religious leaders to promote mainstream Islam and, during a January 2005 forum on terrorism and jihad, he urged the audience not to allow sympathy for the Palestinian cause to allow them to sanction bombings.

110. (U) Maidin was born on December 25, 1957 in Singapore and has a high school level education. He is married to Rahimah binte Asmore and has five children.

Ahmad Khalis Abdul Ghani  
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111. (C) In 2001, Ahmad Khalis Abdul Ghani was easily elected to parliament on the People's Action Party (PAP) ticket from one of the few Group Representation Constituencies to be contested by the opposition (Reftel). Ahmad appears more willing than other Muslim MPs to express his less than total agreement with government policy. For example, he has been skeptical of the government's willingness to consider allowing casinos to operate in Singapore. Even during the 2001 election campaign, he hinted at his dissatisfaction with the government, noting that "no system is perfect" and that he had to do some serious "soul searching" before joining the PAP.

112. (U) Ahmad's involvement in the Malay/Muslim community stretches back to his high school days, when he was chairman of his school's Malay language society. In college, he was president of the National University of Singapore Muslim Society. In 1993, he became the General Secretary of the Muhammadiyah Association, a major Muslim charity that runs nursing homes and a madrasah. In 2002, this was one of several Muslim organizations that urged the GOS to not support the U.S. liberation of Iraq.

113. (U) An enthusiastic supporter of Islamic religious education, Ahmad has argued that Singapore's madrasahs do not turn out extremists. His two teenage daughters attend madrasahs. He is the Supervisor/Honorary Secretary of one madrasah and was a member of the Madrasah Development Committee of the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS) from 1998-2001. Ahmad has said that the madrasah curriculum should prepare students to study at a wide variety of religious and secular institutions. If anyone should monitor Islamic education to detect extremist elements in Singapore, he believes that Muslims themselves should do it. He has urged Muslim leaders to "correct erroneous perceptions of Islam which may be purveyed by the ill-informed" outside the Muslim community.

114. (U) Ahmad was born on July 20, 1960 in Singapore. He graduated from the prestigious Raffles Institution in 1978 and earned a law degree from the National University of Singapore in 1985. He started his own law firm with an ethnic Chinese partner in 1986. Ahmad is married and has four children.

Yatiman Yusof  
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115. (U) Yatiman Yusof was first elected to parliament in 1984. Since 1997, he has been the Senior Parliamentary Secretary at the Ministry of Information and the Arts. Prior

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to that, he spent almost six years at MFA in the same position.

116. (U) Yatiman appears strongly committed to preserving Singapore's multi-racial society and has sternly criticized

Muslims who question the government's treatment of its Malay/Muslim minority. For example, in 2002, he accused the Muslim author of some critical articles of threatening Singapore's racial harmony and condemned Jemaah Islamiyah terrorists as "social saboteurs who undermine our continuous, sustained efforts at creating a multi-racial community living in harmony."

17. (U) Born on September 22, 1946 in Johor, Malaysia, Yatiman worked odd jobs as a youth to support his large family. In 1964, he was forced to take a job in the construction industry because he lacked the money to attend university. Later, he earned a B.A. in Geography and Malay Studies from the University of Singapore in 1972. Before entering politics, he worked as a teacher and as a journalist and editor at Berita Harian, Singapore's Malay-language newspaper. In 1992, he published a book of his poetry. He is married and has four children.

Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman  
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18. (U) Dr. Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman was elected to parliament in 2001. During the last cabinet reshuffle in 2004, he was promoted to the sub-cabinet position of Parliamentary Secretary for the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCDYS). Another Muslim MP, Yaacob Ibrahim, is the Minister at MCDYS, which is the major source of government funding for community and ethnic groups. Mohamad Maliki exemplifies the new style of Muslim MP that the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) has been recruiting: a relatively young and highly educated professional. He has a Bachelors and Masters degree from the National University of Singapore (NUS) and a Ph.D. from the University of Illinois in Social Work. He is an Assistant Professor at NUS.

19. (U) Given his background in social work, Mohamad Maliki has focused his efforts as an MP on strengthening Muslim families in Singapore. He was chosen by the Muslim Community Leaders Forum to head its focus group on family development. He has stated that being a good Muslim means being a good father and has encouraged a redefinition of traditional gender roles to encourage Muslim men to help out more at home. He has also participated in a variety of Muslim groups, including on the Madrasah Steering Committee of the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS) and on the board of MENDAKI, the leading Malay/Muslim education self-help group linked to the government.

20. (U) Mohamad Maliki was born on July 19, 1965 in Singapore. He was the eighth of nine children and grew up in a one-room apartment. His father was a bus driver and his mother was a housewife. He is married to Sadiyah Shahal and they have two children.

Othman Bin Haron Eusofe  
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21. (C) Othman Bin Haron Eusofe is the longest-serving Muslim MP, having been first elected in 1980. He was Minister of State for Manpower from 1997-2001 and became Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office in 2004. Given the ruling People's Action Party's (PAP's) stated interest in recruiting a new and younger batch of MPs for the next general election, it wouldn't be surprising if this is Othman's last term.

22. (U) Othman has a background both in the trade union movement and the Muslim community. He has held a variety of positions at the National Trade Unions Congress since joining it in 1980. He was a founding member of MENDAKI (the leading Malay/Muslim education self-help group linked to the government), served on the board of the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS), and is Vice Chairman of the Social Enterprise Network Cooperative (SENSE), which was created in 2004 to provide job training for Malay/Muslim workers.

23. (U) Although he attends many Malay/Muslim community events, he seldom appears in the press. In his few public comments, he has expressed his concern about maintaining racial harmony in Singapore. In 2002, he reportedly criticized the media for its "sensationalist" and "negative" depiction of Islam, which he claimed threatened Singapore's social cohesion. At a forum for the Malay community on September 11, 2002, he urged Muslims not to view an invasion of Iraq as an attack on Islam, but as a means to combat terrorism.

24. (U) Othman was born in Singapore on December 17, 1940. He has nostalgically recalled growing up in a big family in which siblings looked out for each other. He graduated from the prestigious Raffles Institution in 1960 and earned a B.A. in Economics and Political Science from the University of Singapore in 1964. After graduation, he joined Singapore's civil service, where he worked until entering politics. He

is married and has three children.

Zainudin Nordin

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125. (U) Zainudin Nordin was first elected to parliament in 12001. He has maintained a lower profile than other Muslim MPs and almost never appears in the press. He is co-chairman of the recently launched Youth Development Network. The organization is dedicated to resolving the problems among Malay/Muslim youth in Singapore and to improve coordination of efforts by the various Muslim self-help groups.

126. (U) Born on July 3, 1963, Zainudin is married and has two young daughters. A Francophile, he spent almost four years in France earning a Master's degree in engineering from the College of Electrical and Electric Engineering on a scholarship from Singapore's Economic Development Board. He is presently the Deputy Manager of the Electronics Design Centre of the School of Engineering at Nanyang Polytechnic.  
LAVIN